



BRIEFING: JANUARY 23, 2013 BOARD MEETING AGENDA ITEM #2

TO: Chairman Richard and Board Members

FROM: Mark McLoughlin, Deputy Director for Environmental Planning

DATE: January 23, 2013

RE: San Jose to Merced Project Update and Approach for the Wye

Background

The purpose of this presentation is to provide the Board with a status update on work accomplished in recent months by Authority staff and its regional consultant in identifying and refining alignment options between San Jose and Merced, particularly in the area around the City of Chowchilla where the connection between the east-west and north-south alignment occurs. This area is referred to as the Wye.

Discussion

In July 2011, staff presented to the Board a Supplemental Alternatives Analysis recommending that, in addition to the Ave 24 and Ave 21 alignment alternatives for the Wye, a third east-west alignment alternative, State Route 152, be included for study as part of the San Jose to Merced High-Speed Rail Project EIR/EIS. The Board agreed with this recommendation. Since then, Authority and regional consultant staff have worked with local stakeholders to identify ways to optimize these three east-west options to connect with the north-south portion of the system located in the Central Valley.

On May 3, 2012, the Board certified the Merced to Fresno High-Speed Train Project EIR/EIS, which identified the Hybrid as the preferred north-south alignment alternative between Merced and Fresno. The FRA issued its Record of Decision (ROD) for the document on September 18, 2012. Neither the Authority nor the FRA identified a preferred alternative for the Wye connection to the west as part of the Merced to Fresno decision, acknowledging that this evaluation would occur as part of the San Jose to Merced Section EIR/EIS.

In September 2012, staff provided the Board with an update on the process being followed to gather both resource agency and stakeholder input to refine the Wye alternatives. The Board directed staff to return with an additional update prior to presenting the Supplemental Alternatives Analysis (AA).

In the summer of 2013, the Authority intends to begin construction of the first section of the Initial Operating Segment (IOS) which ultimately will extend 130 miles between Madera (Ave 17) and the northern outskirts of Bakersfield. Given the favorable economic climate and the potential for receiving construction bids below the engineers' estimate, the Authority has been considering options for extending the ICS construction limits to Merced in the north. To reach Merced and build this portion of the track by September 2017, however, the Authority would need to accelerate the identification of a preferred Wye alternative in the vicinity of Chowchilla.

The presentation to the Board will lay out an approach for achieving this goal, including the steps necessary for preparing a Merced to Fresno Subsequent EIR/Supplemental EIS. The SEIR/SEIS would evaluate a set of Wye alternatives located in a geographic area that extends from Carlucci Road to the west, Ranch Road to the north and Ave 17 to the south (the connection point to Construction Package #1). In general, the schedule calls for:

- Convening a set of stakeholder meetings and consultations with the US Corps of Engineers and the US EPA to obtain feedback on the six best performing Wye alternatives (February 2013)
- Based on the feedback obtained from stakeholders and resource agencies, presenting a Supplemental Alternatives Analysis (SAA) and formally recommending to the Board detailed study of the six Wye alternatives as part of a Merced to Fresno Subsequent EIR/Supplemental EIS (March)
- Presenting to the Board a staff recommendation on the identification of a single Wye alternative (i.e., a Proposed Action) for inclusion in the Draft EIR/EIS (April)
- Distributing the Draft SEIR/SEIS (August)
- Completing the Final SEIR/SEIS and obtaining FRA's issuance of a Record of Decision by April 2014

Recommendations

No action by the Board is requested; this is an information item only.